

## Information Item

### *California Postsecondary Education Commission*

#### Workshop on the *Future Direction of California Higher Education and the Commission*

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Commissioners will participate in a workshop on the future direction of California higher education and the commission. The overall objective for the workshop is to allow commissioners the opportunity to exchange ideas, discuss, and debate the major issues facing higher education in California and the Commission's role with respect to these issues in order to help shape future priorities of the agency. The following agenda item provides some brief contextual materials such as describing the environment in which postsecondary education and the Commission operate, the Commission's charge, and the various roles it plays.





# Future Direction of California Higher Education and the Commission

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**Introduction** California postsecondary education has been fortunate during the latter years of the 1990's and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in California. California's robust economy has allowed for significant investments in its educational system. Enrollments have increased appreciably in recent years at both public and independent California institutions of higher education, allowing greater numbers of students to enjoy the benefits of a college education. In addition, for six consecutive years, student fee levels at California's public institutions of higher education have either been maintained or decreased while additional resources have been provided to the State's financial aid programs to allow larger numbers of needy students to enroll in both public and independent colleges and universities. Further, significant new resources have been provided to the systems to begin to address important educational priorities such as outreach to K-12 students, improving the transfer function, investing in technology, and improving and expanding facilities.

However, significant challenges remain ahead for higher education in California. Few believe the State's economic boom will continue indefinitely, particularly as the nation's economy begins to show signs of reduced growth. Additionally, the enrollment surge has already begun to strain our institutions. California's higher education institutions and the Commission – the State's planning and coordinating agency – must address these major challenges in light of the changing environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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## **Changing environment**

The changing nature of the environment within which the Commission and California educational institutions and students operate is emphasized below in order to underscore the complexity of the Commission's coordinating, planning, and policy functions. These environmental changes may further complicate the Commission's ability to successfully complete its objectives.

### *Transitional educational environment*

- ♦ California faces a powerful surge in the number of new students expected to enroll in higher education -- generally referred to as "Tidal Wave II." This surge will be caused by both population growth and an increase in the proportion of students preparing themselves for college admission. The Commission estimates that approximately

714,000 additional students will seek to enroll in California's public colleges and universities by 2010. Additional students may also seek access to the many independent institutions in the state – a large and important segment of postsecondary education in California – as well. Ensuring there is sufficient access for all qualified students who wish to enroll in the state's public and independent institutions of higher education is among the State's most difficult, but important challenges.

- ◆ The State's new Cal Grant guarantee program promises to remove significant financial barriers to college enrollment for recent high school graduates. If student behavior changes significantly as a result of this new guarantee, Tidal Wave II may be even larger than earlier estimations.
- ◆ Governor Davis, Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin, the State Board of Education, and the California Education Round Table, and others have promoted a reform agenda for State's public K-12 schools. Further, strong economic recovery has produced additional appropriations for public schools. Governor Davis has placed an emphasis on increasing both the quantity and quality of K-12 teachers as well as improved linkages between California's public school system and its higher education institutions.

#### *Transitional policy environment*

- ◆ The State Legislature will continue to be affected by: (1) long-term members transitioning from one house to the other, or leaving altogether, as a result of term limits; (2) partisan infighting for control over legislative and budgetary priorities; and (3) a continually changing body of new and inexperienced legislators and staff. As a result of these constant changes, institutional memory in the legislative branch about the goals and principles which under gird California's system of postsecondary education will reside with those staff members who continue to be employed in the Capitol, with education lobbyists, or it will be lost altogether. However, because of the Commission's knowledge and activities during the last 25 years, it will also be in a position to educate new members and their staffs about the policies that affect the postsecondary educational enterprise. In addition, the tension and constant transition in the Legislature may hamper efforts to develop good, long-term policy. All too often, short-term solutions may be offered to pressing problems.
- ◆ A new administration at the federal level and the fact that both parties are just about evenly distributed in the House and the Senate will undoubtedly foster renewed efforts to identify areas for cooperation amidst continuing partisan activities. Key issues likely to occupy the attention of Congress include efforts to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, competing ideas about the appropriate role of the federal government *vis-à-vis* state and local governments

relating to education issues, and the potential impact of significant tax cuts on educational programs.

#### *Transitional social environment*

- ◆ The State's population continues to become more diverse in myriad ways -- age, income, culture, language, race, and life style. Difficulty in reaching consensus on public policies that all Californians view as in the public interest will likely be exacerbated by this diversity in that:
  - The proportions of California's population that are either very young or very old are greater than those in most states.
  - The disparity in incomes between the rich and the poor is greater in California than in any industrialized nation in the world.
  - Over 50 language groups are represented in California public schools -- a reflection of greater linguistic diversity than in any other place, except New York City.
  - California is the first mainland state in which no racial/ethnic group will comprise a majority of the population.
- ◆ Economic improvement has not been even across all sectors of the economy or across all portions of the state. Corporate migration and "outsourcing" of parts and labor to reduce operational costs has had differential impacts on families and communities throughout the state. The income differences between individuals employed in high tech jobs and service jobs -- the two fastest growing sectors of the economy -- will continue to foster tensions based on socioeconomic status.
- ◆ In November 1996, California voters approved Proposition 209, a constitutional amendment that prohibits discrimination or preferential treatment based on race, ethnicity, gender, color, or national origin in public education, employment, and contracting.

#### *Transitional technological environment*

- ◆ Technology is changing the way in which everything and everyone operates. Furthermore, technology is changing at such a rapid pace that it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict what tomorrow may bring.
- ◆ Technology also has an impact on the teaching and learning process. Colleges and universities will continue to reevaluate how best to use technology in all aspects of their operations, from administrative services to the delivery of instruction.

- ♦ Distance learning opportunities are also raising questions about State and federal policies relating to accreditation procedures and the licensure and approval of postsecondary education institutions

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**Access,  
affordability,  
accountability**

Over the past few years, the Commission has identified three intertwining themes to guide its work. They are: providing widespread access to higher education, ensuring affordability of higher education for California's students and their families, and encouraging greater accountability from higher education systems and their institutions.

The Commission continues to believe that the principles of Access, Affordability, and Accountability are fundamental to the future of both California postsecondary institutions and the students they serve. These three themes are also at the center of the Commission's proposed legislative and budget priorities for 2001. In *A Blueprint for Progress: 2001-2002 Legislative and Budget Priorities for the Commission*, the Commission offers the following statements about these three key areas.

*Access: The Commission urges the Governor and the Legislature to develop strategies to maintain the California Master Plan for Higher Education's promise to accommodate all students who qualify and desire a college education.*

*Affordability: The Commission recommends that the State adopt fiscal policies that reduce the "boom and bust" pattern of higher education funding and student fee levels.*

*Accountability: The Commission recommends that the Governor and the Legislature monitor the systems' commitments under the Partnership agreed upon by the Governor with the California State University, University of California, and the system of California Community Colleges.*

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**The  
Commission's  
charge**

These issues and challenges are at the core of the Commission's responsibilities as outlined in the Commission's enabling statute (Chapter 1187, Statutes of 1973). This legislation codified the Commission's mission as:

The statewide postsecondary education planning and coordinating agency and advisor to the Legislature and Governor...to assure the effective utilization of public postsecondary resources, thereby eliminating waste and unnecessary duplication, and to promote diversity, innovation, and responsiveness to student and societal needs through planning and coordination (Education Code Section 66900).

As a result of this charge, the Commission serves a unique role in integrating fiscal, programmatic, and policy analysis about California's entire postsecondary education enterprise.

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**The  
Commission's  
roles and  
responsibilities**

The Commission performs many roles in fulfilling its statutory charge and in grappling with the issues facing higher education. Among the roles and responsibilities of the Commission are the following:

- ◆ *Advocate for higher education:* Through its activities – particularly with the Governor, the Legislature, and the media – the Commission speaks on behalf of postsecondary education, the issues which confront it, and the key role it plays in the future vitality of the State.
- ◆ *Policy Recommender:* Not only does the Commission carefully analyze data and policy options regarding particular postsecondary education issues, but when appropriate, issues recommendations as well. These recommendations will result, at times, in legislation sponsored by others or by the Commission itself.
- ◆ *Consensus builder:* Often requested by others or on its own initiative, the Commission has functioned as a convener of representatives with disparate viewpoints for the purpose of arriving at a consensus on postsecondary education issues.
- ◆ *Policy Analyst and Consultant:* One of the Commission's major roles is to be an analyst of existing or proposed educational policy. The Commission participates actively in the deliberations of the State's policy makers through its consultative role with Executive and Legislative staff as well as the policy and fiscal committees in the Senate and Assembly. Often requested to comment and testify, the Commission articulates perspectives that arise from its analytical activities on issues being debated by the Legislature.
- ◆ *Information Provider:* Integral to its statutory responsibilities, the Commission is the collector, repository, and disseminator of information on California postsecondary education on behalf of the federal and State governments and the educational systems. Through its effective use of technology and highly versatile website, the Commission has been able to provide valuable information about postsecondary education in California to public officials, educators, and members of the public in a user-friendly manner and at no-cost. The Commission's *Guide to California Colleges and Universities*, available both in hard copy and on-line with a variety of search functions, is one of the most helpful tools available to prospective college students and their families. *Student Profiles* and *Fiscal Profiles* – two reports that the Commission publishes annually – provide comprehensive information on a wide range of topics of interest to the educational systems and the general public through individual requests and the Commission's website.
- ◆ *Collaborative Partner:* The Commission participates in statewide committees with varied purposes, from the California Education Round Table – consisting of the chief executive officers of California's educational systems – to advisory committees for special pro-

grams – such as the California Subject Matter Projects and the California Academic Partnership Program.

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**Commission principles**

Historically, the Commission has operated under a set of principles, or guidelines, that serve to set its priorities and focus its efforts. The core of these principles are:

- ♦ The Commission is a consistent advocate for postsecondary education but also an informed and independent critic of it. Although the Commission seeks to achieve consensus among all parties before providing advice to the Governor and the Legislature, it can and does reach conclusions and provide advice on issues where consensus is not reached, particularly when the Commission believes that to do so is in the best interest of the State, its citizens, and postsecondary education students.
- ♦ The Commission understands that good policy is derived from rigorous and non-partisan analyses of issues and the strengths and weaknesses of various options and alternatives. To that end, the Commission views one of its primary responsibilities as providing advice based upon sound and thoughtful analyses to the executive and legislative branches as well as the educational sectors.
- ♦ The promise of the Master Plan for Higher Education can be realized only if there is reasonable balance among the different missions and functions of the higher educational sectors. Absent that balance and absent a fully coordinated system of postsecondary education, the promise of differentiation of function and quality in all systems is likely to fail.
- ♦ The Commission's priorities are to improve the use of resources, to enhance coordination between the sectors of postsecondary education, to encourage educational systems and institutions to be more accountable, and to provide increased service to students and the State.
- ♦ The Commission has been a consistent advocate for students and faculty historically largely absent in postsecondary education. The Commission's interest and activities related to educational equity are motivated not only by its statutory charge, but also emanates from its analysis of the demographic – and thus the educational policy – changes facing the state.

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**Impact on the Commission**

As the result of the changing environment in which the Commission operates, the Commission continues to seek creative and more effective means for planning and coordinating postsecondary education, and recognize: (1) limitations in new resources that can be expected; (2) demand for collegiate access that is at historical levels (3) the potential for technology to both increase costs and produce increased efficiency; and, (4) the changing economic and political pressures that affect the motivation



and capacity for collaboration between California's postsecondary education and training institutions. In addition, the Commission has taken a more assertive role in advocating the importance of a well-educated citizenry to the State's future.

Further, the Commission itself is required to operate in a different fashion than it has in the past. It will continue to need to:

- ◆ Streamline, modify, and enhance some of its recurring responsibilities;
- ◆ Narrow the focus of the policy topics that it will pursue during the coming years;
- ◆ Focus more on the student as the center of the educational process;
- ◆ Continue to explore ways in which technology can assist the Commission to more effectively and efficiently carry out its responsibilities and to improve both the quality and quantity of information about postsecondary education in California upon which policy decisions are made;
- ◆ Find more effective ways of publicizing its policy recommendations to a broader audience to generate the broad-based support necessary to facilitate continued transformation of postsecondary education and improve productivity, teaching, and learning; and
- ◆ Remain sufficiently flexible to respond to contingencies that may arise.

The aforementioned context will be important for the Commission to consider as it discusses its future role and the direction of California higher education.

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